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## **Complications of Pregnancy in Older Women**

Nowadays, many couples are choosing to postpone starting families in order to focus on careers, travel or other activities. Other couples are enduring years of fertility treatments in the hopes of conceiving a child. Whatever the reason, if you are a woman over the age of 35 and are expecting a baby, there are certain risks that you should understand.

As age increases, fertility decreases while the odds of multiple births increase. Older women who are expecting a child should increase their intake of folic acid, cut back on caffeine, eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, refrain from using tobacco or alcohol products and receive regular prenatal care.

### **Pre-eclampsia**

Pre-eclampsia is characterized by high blood pressure and the presence of excess protein in the urine. This condition usually occurs after the 20th week of pregnancy, and is more common in first pregnancies and in women over the age of 35.

Symptoms of pre-eclampsia can include abnormal swelling, sudden weight gain, blurred vision, headaches, dizziness and stomach pain, although most women will experience no symptoms. The only treatment for pre-eclampsia is delivery of the baby. If the condition is detected early, bed rest and careful monitoring are likely until the baby can be delivered. After delivery, blood pressure usually returns to normal without any lasting

### **Gestational Diabetes**

Diabetes is a condition in which the body does not produce enough insulin or cannot properly use the insulin that it does produce. As a result, blood sugar levels can rise to dangerous levels. Gestational diabetes occurs when the placenta produces a hormone that interferes with the body's insulin. It affects approximately three to five percent of all pregnancies, with older mothers at a higher risk. Fortunately, gestational diabetes usually disappears after the baby is born.

Symptoms of gestational diabetes can include extreme thirst or fatigue, but most women will not experience any symptoms. Routine prenatal exams will usually include blood sugar testing. If gestational diabetes is not controlled, there is a risk of delivering a baby with a higher birth weight due to the extra sugars present during gestation.

Diet and exercise can help to reduce the risk of gestational diabetes, and staying healthy during pregnancy offers additional benefits to both mother and baby. Your doctor can help you to find a diet and exercise program that will be beneficial to you and your baby.

## **Placenta Previa**

The placenta is normally located either on the sides or the roof of the uterus; with placenta previa, the placenta attaches near the cervix or covers it completely. This condition occurs in approximately one out of every 200 pregnancies, although the risk is higher for women over the age of 35.

Bleeding during the third trimester is one symptom of placenta previa, but most women do not experience any symptoms. Routine ultrasounds will usually be able to detect the location of the placenta.

Treatment may include reduced activity levels or even bed rest until the baby is delivered. With placenta previa, delivery by cesarean section is recommended.

## **Down syndrome**

Older women are at an increased risk of delivering babies with chromosomal abnormalities, such as Down syndrome. With this condition, the baby is born with an extra chromosome, which leads to birth defects and mental retardation.

Chromosomal abnormalities can be detected through an amniocentesis, but this test carries a small risk of miscarriage. It can also be revealed through Chorionic Villus Sampling (CVS), a procedure in which a small piece of the placenta is removed for testing.

## **Miscarriage**

Miscarriage is the loss of a baby before the 20th week of pregnancy, although most occur by the 12th week of pregnancy. There are a number of reasons that a miscarriage can occur; they are usually the result of the fetus not developing properly.

The risk of a miscarriage increases as the age of the mother increases.

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